AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This Listing of Claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended)   A method for facilitating a secure financial transaction for a user over an open network, comprising:

storing a payment preference profile for the user consisting at least in part of a designation of at least one user account for settlement of network transactions for the user on a customer payment options profile and authentication information database of a financial institution;

receiving, by the financial institution, a user-initiated request ~~by the financial institution~~ from a merchant for settlement of a network transaction with ~~a~~ the merchant;

accessing a customer authentication and authorization server by the financial institution in regard to the user;

securely accessing the user's payment preference profile on the customer payment options profile and authentication information database by the customer authentication and authorization server to identify the user account designated for settlement of network transactions for the user;

initiating settlement of the network transaction with the designated account by a deal closing server of the financial institution, if the user-initiated request for settlement is authenticated and authorized by the customer authentication and authorization server; and

notifying the merchant of payment and confirming completion of settlement of the network transaction to the user by the deal closing server.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein storing the payment preference profile for the user further comprises storing other preferences and rules for the user

instructing the user's financial institution in handling network-negotiated transactions for the user.

3. (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein storing other preferences and rules for the user further comprises storing a hierarchical order in which user accounts designated for settlement of network transactions for the user should be accessed for payment.

4. (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein storing other preferences and rules for the user further comprises storing rules for each user account designated for settlement of network transactions for the user.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein storing the payment preference profile for the user further comprises allowing the user to update the payment preference profile through at least one of the Internet through a designated financial institution website server, telephonically through a customer service representative, and through mail.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein receiving the user-initiated request by the financial institution further comprises receiving payment settlement information over the open network from the user protected by a private key issued by the financial institution for electronic messages which the user intends to be viewed by the financial institution.

7. (Original) The method of claim 6, wherein receiving the payment settlement information over the open network further comprises receiving the payment settlement information from the user protected by the private key in the form of software stored on a processor located at a remote site of the user, wherein the processor comprises one of a personal computer, a personal digital assistant, and a smart card.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein receiving the user-initiated request by the financial institution further comprises allowing the user to select an alternative payment option.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein receiving the user-initiated request by the financial institution further comprises allowing a browser plug-in of a processor of the user to access the processor and formulate a secure electronic authorization/payment message and send the message back through the browser plug-in to an electronic address for a merchant server.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein sending the message back through the browser plug-in to the merchant server further comprises passing the message securely through the merchant server to the deal closing server of the financial institution.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein accessing the customer authentication and authorization server by the financial institution further comprises accessing the customer authentication and authorization server by the financial institution according to identifying information for the user securely stored on a processor located at a remote site of the user, wherein the processor comprises one of a personal computer, a personal digital assistant, and a smart card.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein accessing the customer authentication and authorization server by the financial institution according to the identifying information further comprises accessing the customer authentication and authorization server according to the identifying information for the user securely stored on the user's smart card processor that was programmed by the financial institution when the payment preference profile was stored for the user.

13. – 19.   (Withdrawn)

20. (Currently Amended)   A system for facilitating a secure financial transaction for a user over an open network, comprising:

a customer payment options profile and authentication information database of a financial institution storing a payment preference profile for a user consisting at least in part of a designation of at least one user account for settlement of network transactions for the user;

a deal closing server of the financial institution for receiving, by the financial institution, a user-initiated request ~~by the financial institution~~ from a merchant for settlement of a network transaction with ~~a~~ the merchant; and

a customer authentication and authorization server of the financial institution accessible by the deal closing server for securely accessing the user's payment preference profile on the customer payment options profile and authentication information database to identify the user account designated for settlement of network transactions for the user, wherein the deal closing server is adapted to initiate settlement of the network transaction with the designated account, if the user-initiated request for settlement is authenticated and authorized by the customer authentication and authorization server, and wherein the deal closing server is further adapted to notify the merchant of payment and confirm completion of settlement of the network transaction to the user.

21. – 24.   (Withdrawn)